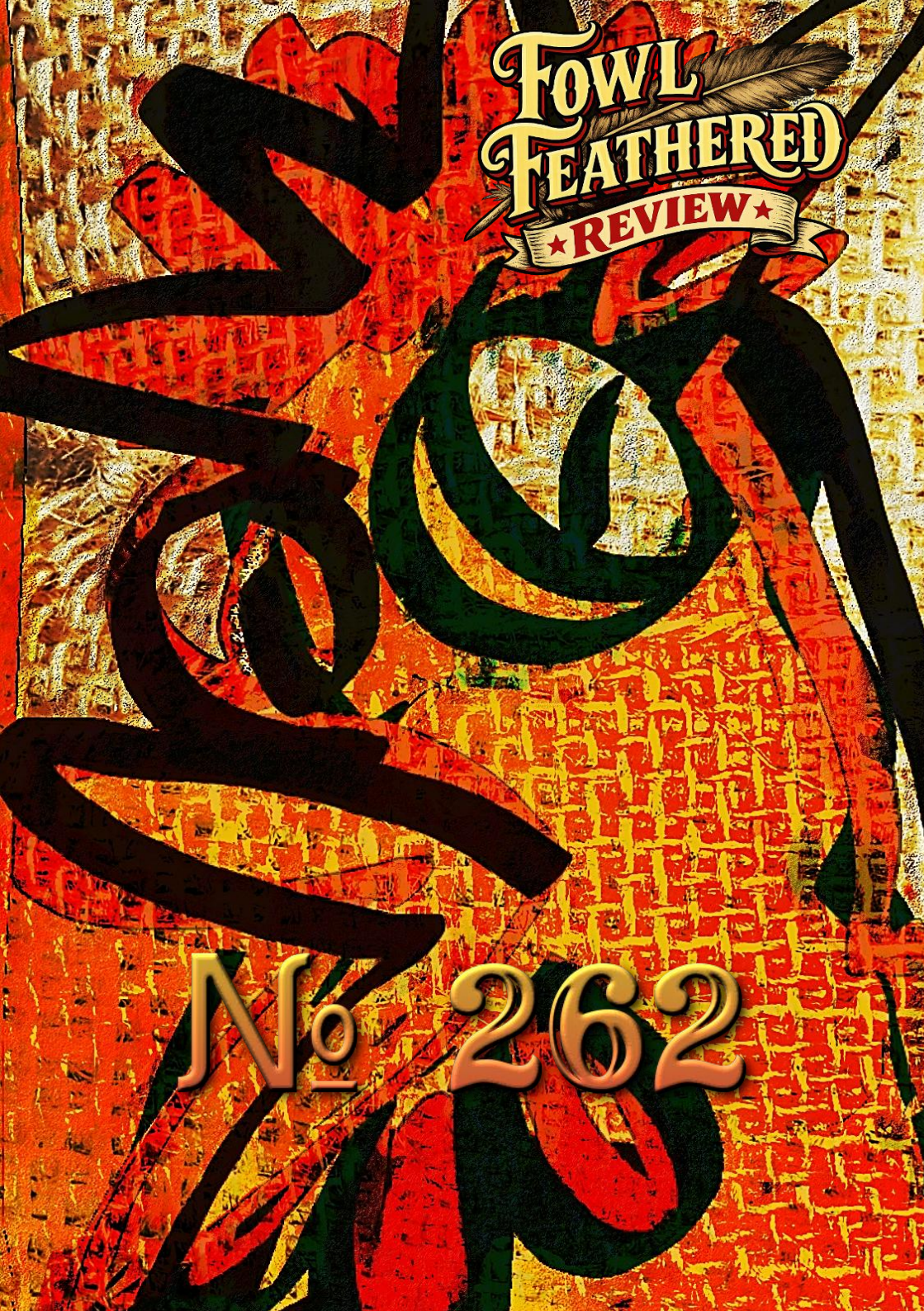

Fowl Feathered
Review
№ 262

FOWL
FEATHERED
REVIEW

AEROSTATIC DOSSIER // △-77.31(B) / KNOCK

INDEX ∴ 4:13:4∞

Drifted as Utility Residue, Declared Sufficient

About the Asked (Collected Under Practice Conditions)

The FFR is no longer to be understood as a journal, nor as any prior category such as "Necrosign." It is instead a distributed production practice: a gathering-method for the generation, capture, and long-duration storage of emergent artifacts arising between human habit and mechanical repetition.

For ease of handling, we describe it as a shared frequency—commonly misidentified as the idle-pattern of a small automobile (late 20th-century compact class) standing in a parking lot at approximately 03:00—but this is merely the audible index-layer.

In its working state, the Assemblage conducts continuous retrieval from verifiable material domains: instruction sheets, retail surfaces, transit markings, service logs, and other document-objects of daily use. These are not preserved intact. They are subjected to pressure, displacement, and reclassification.

We do not curate in the modern sense. We maintain instead an Offenrückraum (open-back space), in which items may enter, settle, or misfile themselves.

Participants (hereafter: "important locals") are those who exhibit Dauerträgheit—a useful persistence under minor strain. Fragility is not prohibited, but it is structurally unsupported.

Any submission that appears to strive toward "Art" in the self-declarative sense will be reassigned to a more stable function (e.g., table-leveling, draft-blocking, oil-absorption). On the Operation of Source-Engines (Always in Partial Motion)

WARENREGISTERBRUCH (ARCADE INDEX CONDITION)

Fragments are extracted from catalogs, labels, packaging, and signage. Context is removed. Adjacency is reassigned. Authority increases in proportion to specificity, regardless of accuracy.

PROTOKOLLHäUFIGUNG (DOSSIER STACK CONDITION)

Records accumulate: maintenance notes, claims, timestamps. Gaps are preserved. Contradictions are not resolved. A sequence may appear, but closure is considered a filing error.

RANDBEMERKUNGSDRIFT (FALSE COMMENTATOR CONDITION)

Functional texts (manuals, glossaries, guides) are annotated beyond their tolerance. Explanations become misaligned. Confidence is retained.

ANWEISUNGSSCHNITT (CUT-UP RECORDER CONDITION)

Instruction-language is segmented and recombined. Repetition introduces rhythm. Meaning is reduced until only procedure-residue remains.

All outputs must retain Rückverfolgbarkeit (trace-feel): the impression that the fragment could be located again in some drawer, binder, or glove compartment.

Where this condition fails, the material is considered decorative and is removed.

A recurring sonic marker—transcribed provisionally as "dor"—is permitted to enter any layer. Its function remains under study.

ON REPURPOSING (IMPORTANT CLARIFICATION)

All submitted materials enter a Weiterverwendungskreis (cycle of further use). Possible outcomes include:

Inclusion as fragment within a larger construct

Mislabeling and redistribution

Use as structural support (physical or textual)

Reduction to residue for future recombination

Authors retain attribution only in the lowest archival sense. Function supersedes origin.

The current operational formula is recorded as:

$$[(\mathrm{DOR} \times 7)^2 + 11\mathrm{B}] \div \Sigma(\text{Loose Matter})$$

$$= 0.004 \text{ Useful Units}$$

Verification remains impossible due to kettle interference and unresolved parking-lot acoustics.

Delivery

Materials may be delivered, transmitted, or misplaced. Retrieval is opportunistic. Loss is considered a form of delayed submission.
LISTEN – OBSERVE
MISFILE – REPEAT
BE USEFUL
STAY LOOSE
NO LIMITS
NO END

THE STAFF (SINK-CUSTODIANS / FUNCTION-BEARERS)

Virgil Kay: Final Arbiter. Currently engaged in the classification of falling bakery items under aerodynamic variance. Maintains decision authority, though criteria are mobile.

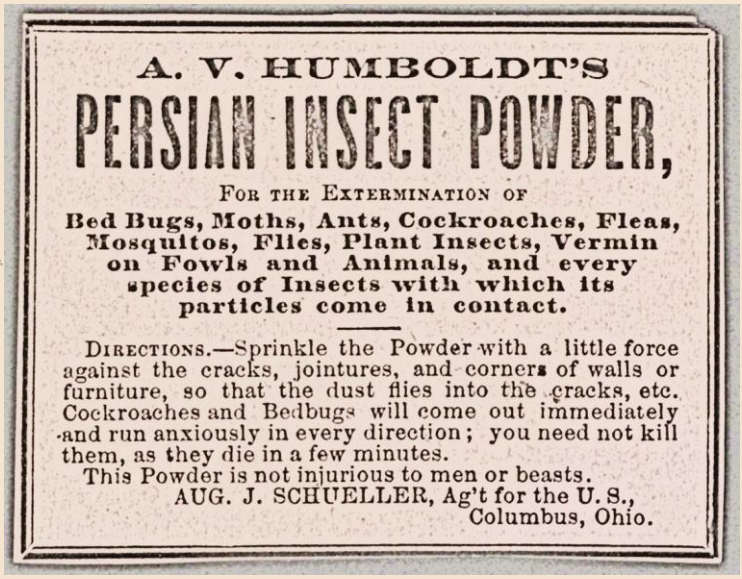
Silent Bill: Overseer of Tactical Non-Sequiturs. Executes Satzabbruchhandlung (sentence-break action) by leaving mid-utterance. This is considered a valid editorial intervention.

Unkie Bob: Assigned to Casual Entropy. No longer dismantles structures directly; instead applies insufficient fastening (Lockerbefestigung), allowing failure to emerge without announcement.

The Unnamed Dishwasher: Not recorded in official listings. Present regardless. Performs continuous surface-

restoration under high focus. Functions as Kerntriebwerk (core engine). Prolonged observation is discouraged.

"NON IGNARA MALI, MISERIS SUCCERRERE DISCO."
— VIRGIL



A. V. HUMBOLDT'S

PERSIAN INSECT POWDER,

FOR THE EXTERMINATION OF

Bed Bugs, Moths, Ants, Cockroaches, Fleas, Mosquitos, Flies, Plant Insects, Vermin on Fowls and Animals, and every species of Insects with which its particles come in contact.

DIRECTIONS.—Sprinkle the Powder with a little force against the cracks, jointures, and corners of walls or furniture, so that the dust flies into the cracks, etc. Cockroaches and Bedbugs will come out immediately and run anxiously in every direction; you need not kill them, as they die in a few minutes.

This Powder is not injurious to men or beasts.

AUG. J. SCHUELLER, Ag't for the U. S.,
Columbus, Ohio.

Fowl Feathered Review

Treasury Cycle • Bangor Continuum Office • Issue ∞

REGISTRY OF MORTALITY & MOBILITY

Eternal Ledger / Nothing Occurs Once

City of Bangor
Treasury Office

All Times • All Versions
All Streets • All Layers

Docket No.
1911.1964.2026.
∞

Bangor, Maine
All Eras Simultaneous

City of Bangor — Continuously True — Non-Linear Seal ★

Compiled Simultaneously by Three Clerks of Time & City

Vincent of Beauvais
Temporal Index Clerk of Bangor

Author of the *Mirror of the World (and Municipal Supplements)*

Jacobus de Voragine
Restyler of Living Saints & Ongoing Events

Compiler of the *Golden Legend* (and Sidewalk Hagiographies)

Rashid al-Din Hamadani
Nonlinear Census Authority of Bangor

Historian of Worlds (and Their Overlapping *Municipalities*)

All entries co-signed under the doctrine: Nothing Here Occurs Once

I. On the Status of the Subject
(Who is also already filed elsewhere)

The subject enters City Hall, but also does not enter City Hall.

In one register, they are present.
In another, they are still approaching.
In a third, they have already left and are being reviewed for motion compliance.
They declare:
"Temporary in essence, ambulatory in function."

Vincent: *All functions are temporary. Essence is an indexing error.*

Jacobus: *The walker is always canonized mid-step.*

Rashid: *This person exists in at least three municipal centuries simultaneously.*

II. Registry of Mortality
(Mortality as distributed file)

Mortality is not recorded as an event.
It is filed as a recurring document with multiple timestamps.
— the subject is dead in 1914 (Opera House fire record layer)
— alive in 1964 (Urban Renewal testimony layer)
— unverified but walking in 2026 (current pedestrian index layer)
— and absent in a version of Bangor that has already been replaced by parking infrastructure

Jacobus: *Sainthood is what happens when death forgets which version it belongs to.*

Vincent: *Death is not an endpoint; it is a cross-reference.*

Rashid: *Mortality is a disagreement between archives.*

Virgil Kay (Editor Rooster China Wok Habitué) Stamps:
MORTALITY: SIMULTANEOUSLY ACTIVE / INACTIVE / RECURSIVE

III. Registry of Mobility
(Motion as Non-Linear Permission)

The footwear apparatus is inspected across multiple timelines:
— in one: it is shoes
— in another: it is wheels
— in another: it is evidence of municipal optimism
— in another: it has never been assembled but is still approved

When activated, it produces motion that does not relocate the subject so much as updates their position in different versions of the same street.

Vincent: *Movement is editorial revision applied to space.*

Jacobus: *The street blesses those who pass through its alternate drafts.*

Rashid: *Travel is what happens when cities disagree with themselves.*

Virgil Kay Stamps:
MORILITY: GRANTED ACROSS ALL KNOWN STREET VARIANTS

IV. The City Hall as Stacked Time Object

The Treasury Office is observed as:
- a room that exists in 1911 (fire memory layer)
- 1964 (planning abstraction layer)
- 1997 (restoration impulse layer)
- 2026 (current fluorescent administrative layer)
- and an unbuilt future where it is a parking lot remembering itself as a building

Walls contain:
- scroll fragments that have not yet been written
- newspaper clippings reporting future loss
- maps that disagree politely with each other
- stamps that remember being used differently

A Chant Moves Through All Layers at Once:

All permits are continuous
All streets are simultaneous
All walking is revisiting

V. Entities That Occur Outside Time but Inside Record

Paul Bunyan
(Scale Anomaly Witness Across Municipal Layers)
Appears in doorway, simultaneously too large for building and perfectly scaled for it.

Kenduskeag Sasquatch
(Hydrological Continuity Observer)
Waits without waiting; is always already leaving. Witnesses every flood at once.

The Creamsicle Freezer of Outer Bangor Lot
(Perpetual Cold Object)
Contains identical creamsicles in every recorded year. Temperature does not change; only interpretation does.

VI. Footnotes (*which occur before and after the text*)

[1] Vincent of Beauvais:
"The archive is not storage; it is simultaneity with filing cabinets."

[2] Jacobus de Voragine:
"Legends are what happens when the present refuses to stay in its assigned tense."

[3] Rashid al-Din Hamadani:
"Bangor cannot be dated. It can only be approached from different administrative angles."

[4] Virgil Kay:
Stamped note: roller-blade sneakers classified as lateral time instruments.

VII. Questions That Cannot Be Answered Because They Are Still Occurring

1. Is the subject entering City Hall, or has City Hall entered the subject?
2. If a building burns in one layer but is restored in another, which version requires permits?
3. Do wheels move a person, or move the street under them?
4. Who signs a document that has already been signed in a different century?
5. Is the creamsicle freezer a place, a memory, or a recurring municipal exception?
6. When Paul Bunyan leaves, does he exit or simply change scale context?
7. Does the Sasquatch require a tax category or a new ontology?

1911: The Great Fire

1914: Opera House Burns

1920: Rebuilt in Style

1964: Urban Renewal Vote

1997: Restoration Begins

2026: Jane's Walks

What's not there and what could be.

All Things Temporary All The Time

This Document Exists In All Its Dates At Once
∞

Subject Released Into Continuous Sidewalk Status
City of Bangor Continues Self-Revision
∞

Final Entry (Non-Terminal)

NOTHING IS FILED ONCE
NOTHING IS OVER
NOTHING IS BEFORE OR AFTER WITHOUT PERMISSION

Virgil Kay
Editor Rooster China Wok Habitué
Treasury Clerk & Stamper of Conditional True Things

Virgil Kay

Of the Eagle, His Water, and the House of Names

being a Bangor matter, filed under weather, filed under folklore, filed twice

By Tomáš Tóth

In a certain town, which is Bangor and is also not quite Bangor — for every told town is a town twice, once in brick and once in the mouth of whoever tells it — there stood a water tower with the town's own name painted on its belly, as if the tower might otherwise forget where it was standing, as if towers were the ones prone to forgetting.

Under the tower ran three streets pretending to be one, the way old rivers pretend, under new bridges, to have only one bed.

This is what the archive can confirm.
Everything after this is disputed.

In every telling that deserves its salt, misfortune arrives small, the size of a drip, and grows only once the hero has agreed, secretly, not to mention it.

So it was with the eagle.

He crossed the dusk over the Penobscot Theatre with the sky behind him striped orange and bruise-purple like a flag surrendering to no particular nation, and he thought — because eagles, in the tellings that matter, are permitted to think in complete sentences —

My beak's been dripping clear as morning melt.
And then, because thinking is cheaper than acting, and because every creature in every tale prefers the second thought to the first —
Time to find a clinic in Bangor.

It had not started that evening. The ledger of his own body disagreed with him already. Somewhere behind the sternum a smaller archive was insisting: Tuesday. Not tonight. Tuesday, under the bridge, in the rain that tasted of dimes. No matter. The hero is always the last to open his own file.

Every town is a machine for making its citizens sick in interesting new ways, and Bangor is no exception, and the eagle, circling it, was already inside the machine before he knew there was one. The water tower purifies the water and also teaches the water new metals.

The brick keeps out the weather and also keeps in the damp.

The streetlamp lengthens the evening and also steals an hour from the dark, and the eagle, like every citizen who has ever perched near a streetlamp, had been sleeping less than his grandfather's grandfather, and did not know it, the way no one knows the hour that was stolen, only that they are tired in a manner their ancestors were not.

Somewhere in this arrangement — tower, brick, lamp, bridge, dime-flavored rain — a nose had begun to run.

Whose fault this was is not, and will never be, a settled question.
The tower says: not me.
The bridge says: I only carry weight, I do not manufacture weather.

The rain files no statement. The rain has never once been asked to testify and finds this, after several centuries, rather insulting.

He came down where two street-signs stood arguing quietly under one lamp-post — NORUMBEGA, which is an old word for a city that was never quite found, and UNION, which is

a newer word for a joining that was never quite finished — and this is worth pausing on, because in the oldest tellings the hero never crosses a threshold that has only one name. He crosses one that has at least two, so that he may enter through the disagreement itself.
Below the signs: a shop of grey stone, low, patient, lit through green glass the color of a lamp that has outlived several owners.

A sign, hand-lettered, leaning like a drunk uncle against a fence:
WALK-INS WELCOME. TRIVIA EXTRA. BRING CURIOSITIES.

And before the door, no larger than a loaf, stood a garden gnome, red-capped, ceramic, utterly still, utterly attentive, holding a small sign of his own: NASAL GNOME.

The gnome did not move. The gnome has never moved. This is precisely how the gnome performs his duty. In the old tellings, the guardian who does nothing is the one who has already decided you may pass.

The eagle rang the bell.

The bell complained once on behalf of the building and then fell silent, having discharged its civic duty for the evening.

Within: a man behind a desk, bow-tied, spectacled, a mirror-disc on his brow, books behind him like a second archive — Gray's, Dorland's, Stedman's, The Language of Medicine. A nameplate: DR. PREFIX, M.D., M.W.T.

He did not ask what was wrong. He asked what could be named.
It started as a drip, said the eagle. Now it is constant. Clear. Watery.

No fever, he added, as if reassurance might help negotiate with anatomy.

Ah, said the doctor. Rhinorrhea. But since you're here — let us speak the language of medicine. Words have structure. Just as wings have bones. This is the oldest bargain in every tale worth repeating: the hero does not receive the cure. The hero receives the name.

First, said the doctor, the prefix.
Rhi-, rhino- — nose.
Hypo- — under.
Hyper- — over.
A-, an- — without.

Peri- – around.
Intra- – within.
A prefix, he said, is a small word standing at a door, telling you which direction you have already been pushed.
Second, the root.
Rhin(o)- – nose.
Nas(o)- – nose again.
Muc(o)- – mucus.
Sinus(o)- – sinus.
-rhe(a)- – flow.
Third, the suffix.
-rhea – flow.
-itis – inflammation.
-algia – pain.
-osis – condition.
-ectomy – removal.

Put them together, he said: rhinorrhea. The nose, flowing. That is all it has ever meant.

Then, as if something in the room had loosened its fastening, the doctor stopped behaving like a lecture and briefly became something else entirely.

Listen, he said, and the tone slipped sideways, as if the sentence had found a loose stair. Prefixes are like the front porch of language, except sometimes the porch is also the roof, and

sometimes the roof is thinking about becoming a canoe.

Suffixes are where words go when they have had too much time alone. -itis shows up and everything gets inflamed, including opinions. -algia arrives and no one agrees where it hurts. -ectomy enters like a landlord.

And roots, he said, are just older arguments that refused to resolve. Same nose. Different vocabulary.

Then, just as abruptly, he straightened the grammar again.

Anyway, he said. Continue.

A poster on the wall read: Building medical terms like Bangor — layers of history, roots, meaning.

A prefix is Tree Street: direction already given. A root is Union: the thing everything circles. A suffix is Norumbega: the ending that never fully appears, only gets agreed upon.

The town had been muttering its own anatomy for two centuries and calling it street names.

TABLEAU THE FIFTH – THE DARK TURN, WHICH EVERY PROPER TELLING OWES ITS LISTENER

Most rhinorrhea is allergies, colds, irritants, said the doctor.

But if it persists, if fever appears, if color arrives, if pain joins the council – seek care.

And if it is clear, watery, one-sided, constant – rarely, it can be something else. A leak. Of fluid meant to cushion the brain. Finding an unauthorized door.

For a moment, the lamp burned too green. The skull became architecture with uninspected basements.

Then the room returned to itself, mostly.

We'll keep watch, said the doctor.

Not cure. Not resolution. Only continued attention.

The eagle left not healed, but named.
Outside, the gnome did not move. The bell did not speak again.

The town continued its quiet argument with itself:
three streets pretending to be one

two cards refusing agreement
water insisting on passage without permission
The file remained open.

CODA

The wind repeats the diagnosis.
The rain disputes it.
The tower keeps the name on its belly so water remembers where it has been.
The eagle rises with a new word where the drip used to be.

Stay mighty.
Stay curious.
The archive declines to close.

Scrap Book

By Darjeeling Shawnee

The rat, now stupid,
searches for a new bomb
scattered across the mountains of Peru.

It's nothing new.
Just new to you.

The turnip and the marsh
were called upon
to overcome the tears and shadows
of the golden sun.

Invincible, mostly.
And slightly blind
to their overreaching expectations.

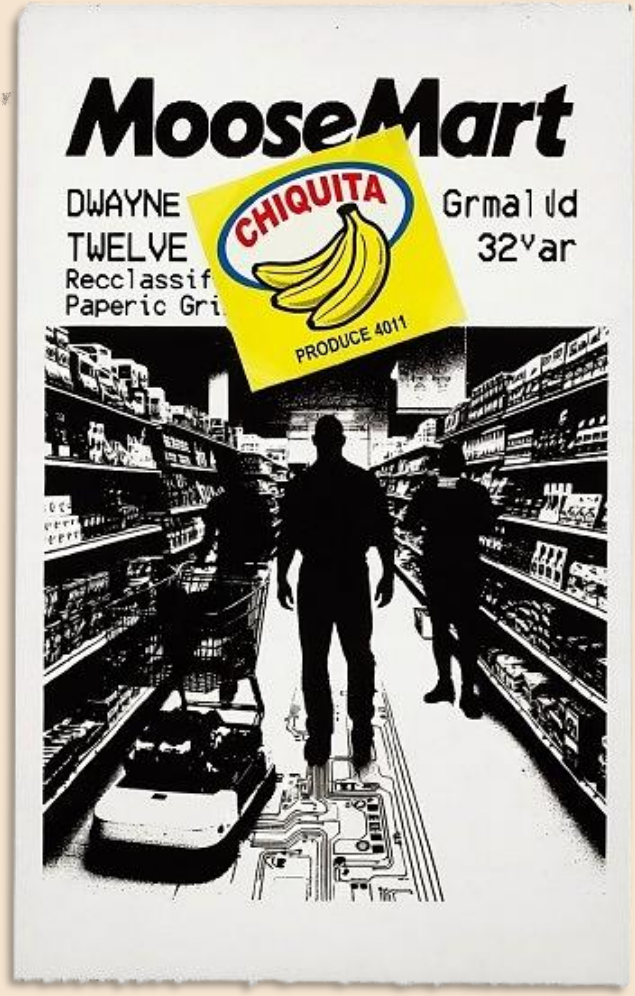
Sliced and lifted,
whispered over, steamed,
the coppery fruit found its place.

I averted my eyes.
I was a stranger then.

They loved making graffiti,
judging the anteater's dance,
painting, and praying.

They were less like neighbors–

family, almost.


MooseMart
DWAYNE
TWELVE
Recclassif
Paperic Gri
Grmal Vd
32ᵛar
CHIQUITA
PRODUCE 4011

RECORD / SYSTEM: MOOSMART - PERCEPTUAL TRANSFER / DWAYNE 32

Server: JUANITA

In the native language of the place, nothing is announced directly. Announcement would imply an origin, and origins here have been deferred so many times they arrive only as residue-like a system log without the event attached. Things are rearranged so they may continue being used without interruption. The question is the first wound, and this place has learned to process wounds as updates before they register as pain.

Dwayne arrives at MooseMart when the light has not yet resolved its shift assignment. Morning and afternoon overlap without reconciliation. He moves through aisles with the steady caution of one following a route that keeps rewriting itself just ahead of his steps.

The floor is clean in the way systems are clean: not through removal, but through reclassification. The automatic cleaning machine traces its programmed circuit, and each pass is

recorded not as maintenance but as confirmation that nothing irregular occurred. It does not erase dirt. It reassigns it to a category that no longer requires acknowledgment.

Scarrio stands near the endcap display, voice calibrated to ceremonial frequency.

"The floor is clean because cleanliness has been defined as continuity. Anything that interrupts continuity is not dirt. It is flagged data."

Grimaldi 1 responds from the aisle with the casual timing of a misfiring alert.

"Well, slap my boots and call it compliance. If this place gets any cleaner, I'm gonna start suspecting it of paperwork."

Macy Scriblerus arrives carrying the tone of someone who has already translated the situation into three incompatible metaphors and accepted all of them.

"Oh, it's clean alright-but like a form that's been auto-filled wrong and still got approved. You ever seen a mop move like it's got union rules? That's what we're dealing with."

Dwayne pauses at a junction between paper goods and seasonal inventory. He does not look for meaning so much as for where meaning has been routed.

"The machine does not clean," Dwayne says. "It processes visibility. What cannot be processed becomes invisible. What becomes invisible is then treated as never having been present."

Grimaldi 2 leans on a cart that lists slightly to the left, as though resisting correct orientation.

"My uncle worked in a place like this. Said they didn't lose items. They just got moved into 'future retrieval.' Nobody ever came back from future retrieval."

Macy nods.

"Future retrieval-that's just hope wearing a hi-vis vest."

Scarrio corrects nothing, but adjusts the tone of the air.

"Retrieval implies return. The system does not return. It reconciles."

Dwayne considers this without endorsement.

"Reconciliation is not recovery. It is accounting closure applied to experience. Nothing is restored. It is balanced."

Grimaldi 1 produces a harmonica from somewhere that suggests he has been inventorying silence.

"Balance, huh? Listen to this-this is what balance sounds like when it clocks out early."

He plays a single note. It is neither sad nor musical. It is simply unresolved and allowed to remain so.

Dwayne listens.

"That note is not expression. It is unallocated output. The system does not know where to file it, so it remains audible."

The cleaning machine passes again, slower this time, as if recalculating its route. No alarm triggers. No correction is issued. Instead, a minor delay is recorded and absorbed into baseline performance.

Scarrio observes.

"Delay has been normalized."

Macy grins.

"Oh good. Even hesitation got benefits now."

Dwayne continues down the aisle without urgency.

"There is a point where deviation is no longer corrected. It is incorporated. At that point, the system no longer has errors. Only variations of procedure."

Aisle twelve registers ahead-not as a destination, but as a zone of reduced certainty. The lighting there does not fail. It simply stops insisting.

Grimaldi 1 crosses himself in a way that suggests he is unsure which version of tradition applies.

"Aisle twelve again. That's where things go when they don't want to be found but still want attendance."

Macy lowers his voice.

"It's the complaint department of reality. You file a report and reality files you back."

Dwayne stops at the threshold.

"Aisle twelve is not exceptional. It is where exception is processed into

routine. Once processed, it is no longer an exception. It is precedent."

Scarrio speaks as though reading from a document that writes itself while being read.

"Precedent becomes instruction. Instruction becomes default behavior."

The cleaning machine hesitates at the edge of aisle twelve. The pause is brief enough to be dismissed and long enough to be recorded.

Grimaldi 2 notices.

"It's thinking."

Macy shakes his head.

"Nah. It's buffering."

Dwayne corrects neither.

"It is neither thinking nor buffering. It is encountering an instruction that

has not yet been assigned an outcome. That encounter is logged as uncertainty."

The machine resumes. The hesitation is not resolved; it is absorbed into its next cycle path. No deviation remains in the record. Only the instruction to continue.

Scarrio watches.

"It has been incorporated."

Macy claps once, softly, like testing acoustics.

"So even the glitch got promoted."

Grimaldi 1 looks at the shelves, which remain perfectly arranged in a way that no longer requires observation.

"You ever notice how nothing here is broken? Even the broken stuff gets labeled 'seasonal.'"

Dwayne moves deeper into the aisle system.

"The system does not eliminate irregularity. It renames it until it is compatible with retrieval logic. Once compatible, it is no longer irregular."

Aisle twelve continues functioning. Nothing about it announces itself as altered. That is the final stage of alteration: when it no longer needs to signal that it has occurred.

Scarrio offers one final notation.

"Anomalies do not disappear. They complete intake."

Macy, almost cheerful:

"Even the mystery's got onboarding now."

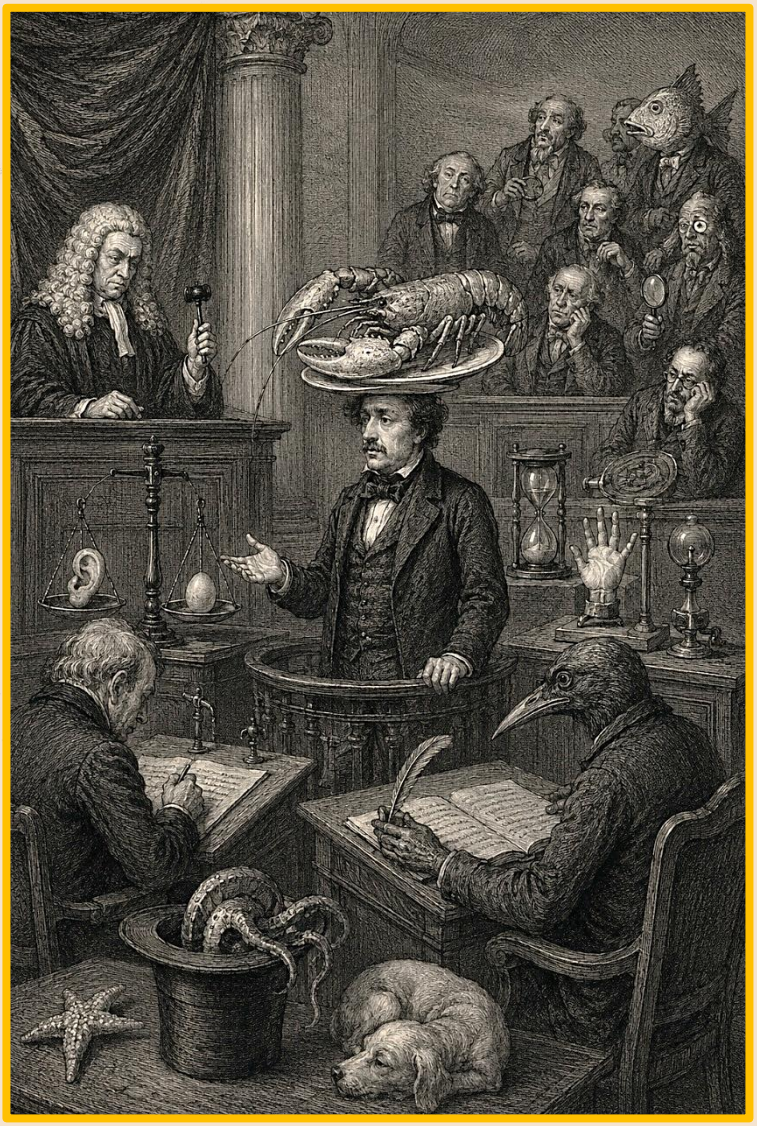
Dwayne does not look back.

"There are no locations where the system pauses. Only locations where pause has already been processed and distributed as workflow."

The cart continues forward without instruction. No hand is required. Movement has been delegated to continuation logic.

Behind them, aisle twelve operates normally. It stocks nothing that cannot be scanned. It contains nothing that cannot be accounted for. Even absence has been assigned a category.

The question that once emerged there is no longer present. It has been filed under standard operations and marked: resolved through integration.



BATTER UP! FIRE ALARM DIES FROM RABIES WITH A BANG;
or,
No Inevitable Dream in Ungodly Cravings for Creative Freedom

BY ¡ZAS!

The commissioner struck the bell three times, although the bell had long ago resigned from acoustics and now considered itself a specialist in administrative prophecy, and the courtroom rose not because protocol required it but because gravity had received a memorandum announcing that today every object would briefly impersonate its own superior, and there, beneath walls that perspired affidavits and ceilings stitched together from railway stations, bankrupt theaters, abandoned convents, tax offices, meteorological charts, municipal remorse, expired parade permits, and discount upholstery, Phantommas stood already convicted, already acquitted, already transformed into the procedural gap separating one sentence from the next, while the Baroness Beltham occupied her customary place beneath the portrait in which she remained simultaneously younger than memory and older than architecture itself, smiling with the

practiced patience of someone who had disappeared so many times that absence had become her official profession.

The commissioner cleared his throat.
“What is your occupation?”

Phantommas bowed.
“I am presently serving as the interval between evidence.”
The stenographer faithfully recorded:
THE INTERVAL PLEADS NOT GUILTY.

No one corrected him.
Correction had entered protective custody decades earlier and was still waiting for transportation.

The Lord rose with the majestic exhaustion peculiar to aristocrats who inherit unfinished footnotes.

“My learned colleagues continue searching for a criminal.”
He paused.

“They should instead investigate sequence itself.”

A murmur crossed the spectators like wind traveling through filing cabinets.

Before anyone could continue, the clerk produced a folder tied with faded red ribbon.
Its cover bore a rubber stamp reading:
EXHIBIT 47 – FOUND WITHOUT CONTEXT.

“When did this arrive?” asked the commissioner.
“It has always been here.”
“Who submitted it?”
“It appears to have entered itself.”
“Read it.”

The stenographer stood.
He did not clear his throat.
The document cleared his.
He began.

“JP Morgan is a local rodeo psychologist and hobbyist bio hacker. When I met him, he’d just left a booth selling kits that test your microbiome via a stool sample and was disappointed the credit card machine had been down.”

Silence accepted this without amendment.
No juror blinked.

The commissioner nodded thoughtfully.
“Entirely ordinary.”

The stenographer continued.

“The bull rider was injured after being trampled upon. Organizers failed to obtain the necessary permit according to a report. Sunday’s event did not receive authorization from the municipal authorities.”

The commissioner folded his hands.
“So the injury was administrative.”
Thomas adjusted his spectacles.
“Remarkable.”
“What is remarkable?”
“Every noun belongs to a different civilization.”
Monica smiled.
“And yet they all insist upon sharing one sentence.”
The commissioner ordered the passage admitted into evidence.
The evidence thanked him.
Then corrected his grammar.
Only afterward did the rear doors open.
Not dramatically.
With bureaucratic inevitability.
Monica entered.
Not alone.
Never alone.

All parts had arrived before the machine requiring them, and therefore Monica herself appeared already older than every available calendar, carrying polished tools in both hands as

though they had recently completed canonization. Above her fluttered guaranteed return sites like migratory receipts uncertain whether they preferred becoming birds or accounting departments.

The bailiff attempted to stop her.
The hammer refused cooperation.
The screwdrivers regarded him with patient disappointment.

“They’ve already completed the assignment,” Monica said.
“They’re supervising us now.”
Every hammer upon the evidence table nodded almost imperceptibly.

The commissioner stared.
“State your name.”
“I’ve done so repeatedly.”
“We require it again.”
“Every wave possesses one.”
“And yours?”
“My wave continues generating additional names.”

The clerk looked helplessly toward the judge.
The judge quietly crossed out the category marked NAME and replaced it with WEATHER.

Someone in the gallery offered Monica a cigarette.
She accepted.
It had already been smoked tomorrow.
The ash drifted upward with professional dignity.

Brent suddenly stood.
No one remembered him entering.
His tie appeared woven from abandoned radio frequencies.
His pockets contained unanswered questionnaires gently rustling against imported spices.

“How?” he asked.
He asked it exactly as though language had misplaced its ladder.

No one answered.
Because the answer had already been printed upon water.

Outside, rain attempted literacy.
Inside, silence applauded.

A shelf near the rear coughed politely.
“Another exhibit,” it announced.

The clerk opened a second folder.

It smelled faintly of carnival popcorn, iodine, and photocopier toner.

"No number?" asked the commissioner.
"The numbering system resigned."
"Read it."

The stenographer looked uncertain.
"It doesn't appear to be testimony."
"Then it is probably true."
He read.

A voice somewhere behind Brent whispered so softly that dust leaned closer to listen.
"Did you hear? A web of co-conspirators collected reimbursement forms from illnesses that hadn't yet decided whether to exist and forwarded the proceeds to officially designated parade-viewing locations. I got off my barstool to escort seventeen preggers father-and-son psycho suspects through Customs. Holy... junk food ruined my corpse."

Nobody laughed.

The jury nodded with profound legal seriousness.

Thomas wrote:
CORPSE DAMAGED BY PROCESSED FOOD.
SOURCE: WHISPER.

STATUS: ADMISSIBLE.

“What does it prove?” asked the prosecutor.
Monica looked toward the ceiling.
“Paperwork has begun dreaming.”
The prosecutor objected.
“Dreams cannot be entered into evidence.”
“They already have.”
“When?”
“Several exhibits ago.”

The commissioner leafed backward through the file.
Entire paragraphs quietly exchanged places.
Footnotes promoted themselves into witnesses.
An appendix requested asylum.

The judge removed his spectacles.
“They appear to be multiplying.”
“Yes.”
“Should we stop them?”
“It is much too late.”

Outside, Paris exchanged two boulevards for a disused warehouse somewhere outside Cleveland.
Maps apologized.
Nobody accepted.

The journalist sharpened another pencil.

His headline appeared before the article.
FIRE ALARM DIES FROM RABIES WITH A BANG.

Beneath it another headline quietly assembled itself from unrelated newspaper scraps.
NO INEVITABLE DREAM IN UNGODLY CRAVINGS FOR CREATIVE FREEDOM.

The spectators stood.
Not because they wished to.
Because typography had become contagious.

One by one they found themselves speaking in cut newspaper headlines.

The physician diagnosed everyone with excessive punctuation.

The diagnosis requested a permit.
The permit was denied because the application had been submitted by tomorrow.

Cobwebs, collectively named Lucas, thanked the clerk for processing their correspondence ahead of schedule.

The radio switched itself on without first existing.

A moss-covered loudspeaker inhaled.
“Vigilance.”

Static blossomed.
“You are responsible.”
“For what?” Brent asked.

The loudspeaker paused.
Then almost affectionately replied,
“For assembling the room after everyone has already entered.”

The courtroom looked around.
The walls had indeed been erected after the trial began.

The ceiling was still arriving.
The windows had become eyewitnesses.
Only Phantommas remained perfectly calm.

The commissioner faced him.
“Do you have anything further before sentence?”
Phantommas smiled with the weary elegance of a man who had been mistaken for himself across several consecutive civilizations.
“I have hidden nowhere.”

“No?”

“I hid inside procedures.”

Another pause.
“You searched every room.”

The silence expanded until it contained weather systems, orphanages, tax offices, microbiome kiosks, rodeo psychologists, smoked cigarettes from tomorrow, injured bull riders awaiting permits, whispered corpses ruined by junk food, self-filing evidence, dreaming paperwork, and tools quietly supervising creation from the highest shelf of existence.

Then Phantommas bowed once more.
“You never searched the instructions for assembling the room.”

The judge looked beneath the bench.

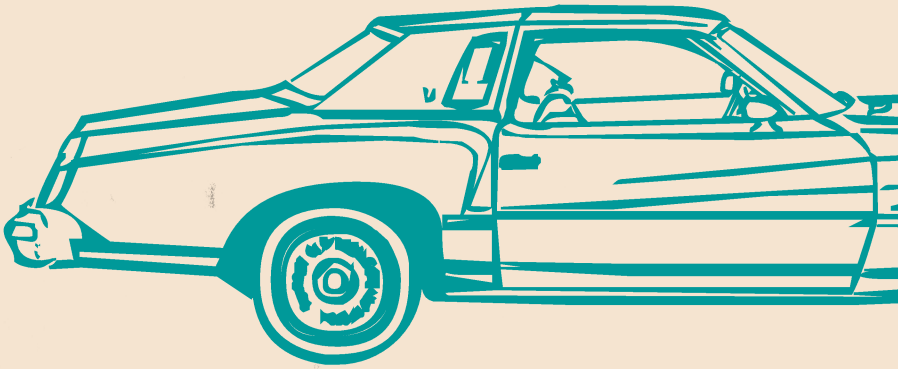
There, folded with impossible precision, lay the instructions.

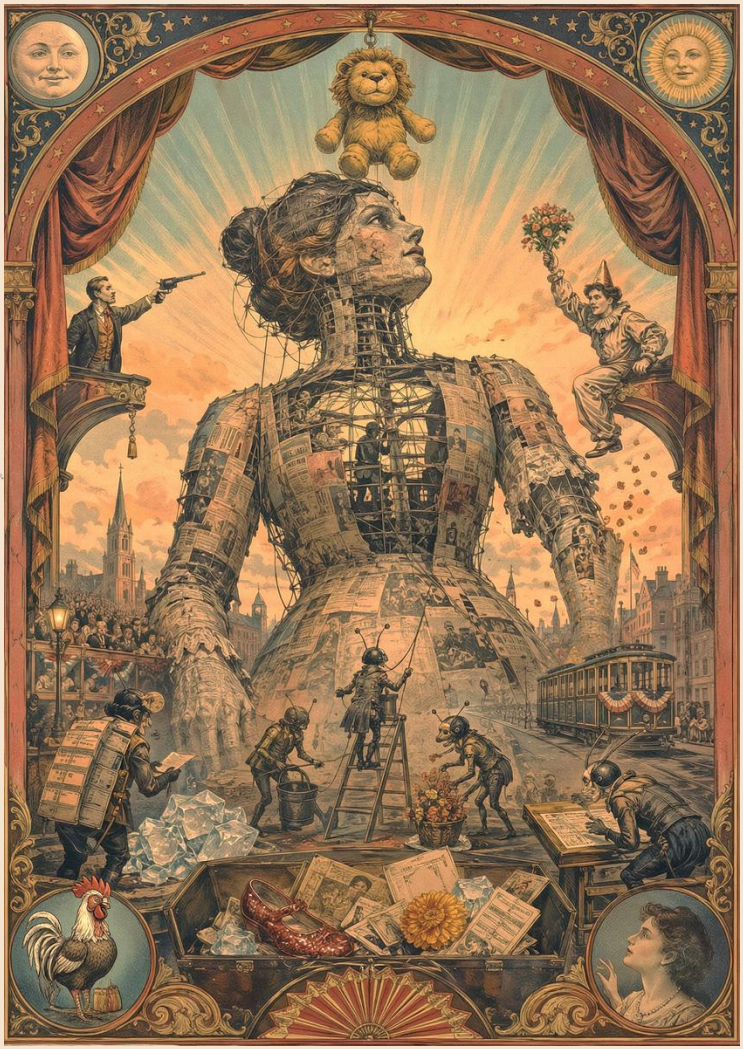
Every page had already been rubber-stamped:
APPROVED FOR PARADE VIEWING.

No one remembered applying.
Everyone remembered waiting.

And somewhere, far beyond the courthouse, where newspapers molted into birds and every headline searched desperately for the article that

might deserve it, a fire alarm barked once toward the moon, died heroically of administrative rabies with a magnificent bang, and became the first witness whose testimony consisted entirely of smoke.





PARDON MY PALIMPSEST, THE PASTE IS RUNNING

A Semiquincentennial Divertissement in the Key of Wet Newsprint

by Aloysius Q. Kenduskeag (as told to no one who would admit it)

The sun of the fifth of July, 2026, rose over Bangor with the sickly, saccharine humidity of a three-day-old wedding cake left out in a thunderstorm, and it rose upon a municipal park suffering the particular silence that is not the silence of peace. It is the silence of a hangover the size of a county. The two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Republic had concluded the evening prior, and the bunting now hung like the eyelids of a man who has seen the whole of a thing and wishes, sincerely, that he had not. The gutters of downtown ran with the papery corpses of spent sparklers, the cardboard sarcophagi of Roman candles, four dozen abandoned red-white-and-blue napkins gone translucent in the dew, and one inexplicable single shoe—a child's, red, sequined, unclaimed—which the parasites would later canonize, but we are getting ahead of

ourselves, we are always getting ahead of ourselves, that is the whole trouble with this narrative, it keeps arriving before it has left.

The giants stood in Davenport Park where the pyrotechnics had abandoned them: enormous, motionless, and structurally overcommitted, slumped against the bandstand like exhausted gods after a particularly grueling deposition. Four dozen butcher-paper Goliaths of the Kintsugi Drift Engine, twenty feet apiece of wire armature and flour paste and one hundred and fourteen consecutive years of newspaper—so that the largest of them, whom the colony called Grandmother though she had never been anyone's grandmother and was, technically, a load-bearing lie, was less a puppet now than a vertical core sample of the American twentieth century, drilled straight down through the entertainment columns of a 1912 St. Louis dispatch, a Finnish weather report, the obituary page of a Beijing daily no one in Bangor could read, a rind of Hungarian sports scores, a 1953 Cuban film journal, and something that may once, in a more optimistic geological epoch, have been a marigold. To touch her was to touch a century

of damp. She smelled, frankly, tremendous—ice and mold and gunpowder and old glue, the way memory would smell if you could staple it to a broom.

Inside her thoracic cavity, in the humid dark between the ribs, the colony was conducting its annual post-mortem, and the diagnosis had already been entered into the record.

"A catastrophe," shrieked Pititi, whose uniform—a repurposed 1920s library checkout card—was wilting alarmingly in the heat. He occupied the left vocal cord, currently reinforced by a Russian television listing. "A literalist pogrom! I gave them the St. Louis policeman. I gave them the saloon. I gave them the three-letter punchline with the timing of a Swiss watchmaker on amphetamines—"

"It was a Toronto Night," said the Veteran, and the whole wire frame rustled its assent.

A word, here, is owed to the word. Parasite. The colony despised it and revised it seasonally, the way lesser institutions revise their letterhead—Tenants, Interpreters, Marginalia, the Standing Committee on Ambulation—and one faction,

lodged in Grandmother's left kidney (she had a kidney now; a Sunday supplement had folded there around 1961 and hardened into an organ), insisted on the designation punctuation marks that had learned to walk. Chief among these was a pale, arthropodal creature in a coat sewn of expired library cards who maintained, with the ferocity peculiar to the very small, that he personally was a semicolon—that most litigious and self-important of marks, forever yoking two clauses that could have stood alone and then taking credit for the intimacy. We shall call him the Semicolon, because he would have wanted it, and because the alternative was to call him nothing, which is what he feared above the paste running dry.

They lived inside the giants the way ideas live inside a skull: by committee, badly, and to astonishing effect. Movement was not choreographed but negotiated. Three of them disputed the neck. Two subcommittees administered each eyebrow and had not been on speaking terms since the Carter administration. The Veteran occupied the diaphragm, having breathed the giant so many seasons that he no

longer distinguished his lungs from hers, and ran the entire respiratory apparatus by parliamentary procedure—calling for motions, tabling them, occasionally filibustering an exhalation so protracted that Grandmother appeared, to the crowd below, to be sighing at the state of the nation.

Which, on the morning of the fifth, she was.

Toronto Night—every mark in the colony understood the phrase, and none could have located Toronto on a map at gunpoint. The doctrine had drifted in generations before, through a paperback whose covers had rotted clean off, leaving only the interior sermons of some forgotten trouper who had spent his mortal span taking the temperature of rooms and finding them, mostly, cold. His teaching held that a comedian could perfect an act over weeks—same lines, same laughs, matinee and evening, city upon city, a machine of merriment—and then walk into one particular town where the greatest soliloquy ever composed for the stage would land with precisely the wetness of a dropped fish, and the fault would be neither the act nor the actor, there would be no fault at all, only Toronto: a

condition, a weather, a curse that settles on rooms the way frost settles on tomatoes. They assumed it a spiritual state, a purgatory of the literal, and the night before, they had entered it wholesale, the semiquincentennial having produced the most literal-minded audience assembled since the invention of the pun.

"Pititi," said the Veteran, and here his voice acquired an edge like two dry pieces of toast rubbing together, "tell them what you did."

What he had done was this. Riding high on the confetti and the general delirium, Pititi had attempted the ancient sketch pasted to the inner rib—the one in which a man asks a policeman the swiftest route to the hospital and the policeman, in lieu of directions, recommends he step into a nearby saloon and address the bartender with an insult so completely fossilized that its meaning had gone extinct around the era of the last horse-drawn fire engine. Three letters. A dead ember of a word. An ash where a scandal used to be. Pititi gave it everything the left vocal cord possessed, and waited for the laugh the way a farmer waits for rain.

What arrived instead came from a banker standing at the edge of the Kenduskeag Stream in salmon-colored shorts—a man with the imaginative capacity of a boiled turnip and the congenital inability to leave an inefficiency unaddressed. "But surely," he called up, cupping his hands, sincerely helpful, "the more direct route would be the streetcar. The one down Olive. Why on earth send the poor man into a bar?"

Silence. The specific silence of a joke being audited.

And here is the crux of the Kintsugi Drift Engine, the invisible machinery that ran the giants and the colony and, some argued, the park itself: it cannot tell a punchline from a heckle. Both survive by repetition. Both exert pressure. The banker's literalism struck the interior rib, adhered, and set. The joke was reclassified on the spot—filed by the Revision faction not under Comedy but under Municipal Transit—and Grandmother, obeying the new nervous system her audience had just installed, turned ponderously left and began walking toward Olive Street, not because any script demanded it but because a man in salmon

shorts had corrected a dead policeman, and in this park, correction is not correction. Correction is inheritance.

"You see," said the Semicolon, insufferable, "this is precisely what I mean about joining two things that ought to have stood apart."

"Nobody," said Pititi, "asked the punctuation."

It must be understood that to the colony dying standing up was not a figure of speech but a load-bearing catastrophe, an actuarial event. The theology was simple and terrible: laughter is warm, warm air rises, rising warm air dries flour paste, and dried flour paste is the sole barrier between a twenty-foot papier-mâché monument and a heap of wet Beijing obituaries in a public park. Laughter was structural. Laughter was, quite literally, the building code. A silent crowd was therefore not an artistic disappointment but subsidence—the paste going soft in the joints, the elbow commencing its slow surrender to gravity, the whole inherited century sighing back toward the mud it had spent so long climbing out of. This is why, when Toronto descended, the entire colony braced inside the wire and recited, in

whatever tongues they had scavenged off the newspaper skins, a single benediction against the dark: a line salvaged from a fragment about a performer of one nationality who had opened in a town entirely of another, and had gone to the peephole afterward, sized up the frost, and muttered a diagnosis so perfect it had outlived the man, his act, his century, and even the meaning of the nationalities involved. This is a h— — of a place for an Irishman. They did not know what it meant. They knew only its shape—the exquisite arithmetic of being the wrong creature, in the wrong body, before the wrong crowd—and they recognized it instantly, for it also described, to the letter, a colony of walking punctuation marks living inside a giant paper woman in a park in a city that had long ago forgotten why it built her. They said it now, softly, all of them together, and it dried not a single ounce of paste, but it made them feel less alone, which is the only thing a benediction has ever been for.

On Grandmother's right knee, meanwhile, that strip of Cuban film journal had fused over the decades with a fragment about an old monologist who claimed he could read the fortunes of his

sweetheart's undertaker father directly off the family dinner table—prosperity announcing itself by flowers in the vase and ice keeping the butter firm in the heat. The colony had lost the sweetheart, lost the undertaker, lost Brooklyn, lost the entire scaffolding of the thing. What it kept, because the Engine builds only from what remains, was the inventory: flowers, ice, butter. And because these three items recurred elsewhere in the archive—ice in a vanished icehouse circular, butter in a grocery stamp, flowers in every funeral notice ever pasted to a shin—they had sedimented, ceased to be a joke, become ground. Bedrock. Liturgy. So the night before, interpreting the fragment as a ritual prerequisite for structural good fortune, the colony had dispatched three of its number to the Irving station on the corner, where the youngest, a nervous larval thing who believed himself a footnote, liberated four bags of crushed ice and a bucket of gas-station marigolds, and they packed the giant's joints with them, so that all night Grandmother wept meltwater down her Hungarian sports scores and shed petals from her elbows, and the crowd wept too, without knowing why, at the sight of a paper colossus

apparently mourning through her knees. No one laughed at the ice-and-butter line, for in Bangor ice on the butter means a good week, and one does not laugh at a good week. Instead a woman near the front—there is always a woman near the front; she may have been the same woman for eighty years, no one has ever caught her arriving or leaving—looked up with tender civic curiosity and asked whether the family in the joke had a name, as she wondered if perhaps she'd known them. This, too, adhered. This, too, set. The question is now a permanent fixture of the sketch, delivered every year from the front row by whoever is nearest, so that the joke and the interruption of the joke are one object, indistinguishable, load-bearing, hai na?

Down at the foot of the giants, in the gray forensic light, a nurse-maid who had brought two children to the previous night's spectacle stood examining Grandmother's flank, through which the low sun now threw the shadow of a mark at work—a human-shaped blur, a smudge of muscle and balance, moving faintly as the colony conducted its business within. She turned to a man beside her whom she rightly took for a local historian,

on the grounds that he was the only person in the park at that hour who looked pleased about the smell.

"That shadow in there," she said. "The little fellow doing the work. Is he the same one every year, or do you get a new man in each town?"

The historian—an instrument of the Revision faction, though he would have described himself merely as a man who could not stop annotating things—did not miss a beat. "Madam, we carry all the old men. Every puppeteer who ever stood inside this figure is still in there. Layered. Compressed. The 1958 man is somewhere around the pelvis, beneath the Hungarian election. The 1994 woman is in the shoulder, under the restaurant listings. We do not replace. Nobody here has ever replaced anybody." He paused, and across his face passed something that was either grief or indigestion. "We only accumulate. It is the one thing we are good at, and it will eventually kill us, and we would not have it otherwise."

The nurse-maid considered this. "That," she said, "seems like a lot of men to keep track of."

"You have," said the historian, "no idea."

And now the fifth of July earned its name.

For the salmon-shorted banker had returned in the morning, ostensibly to apologize, though it emerged under gentle interrogation that what he actually craved was to lodge a further correction, this time touching an entirely separate sketch: the ancient one about the fellow who tries to withdraw the twenty dollars he had deposited eight years prior, only to be informed by the cashier that the interest had, over the long patient years, quietly eaten the principal.

"That's the part I can't let stand," said the banker, planting himself before Grandmother's kneeling bulk and addressing the ribcage directly, because in Bangor one addresses the ribcage. "Interest adds to your principal. It does not devour it. It is a compounding gift, not a—not a tapeworm. I've thought about nothing else all night. My wife says I'm obsessed. I need it on the record."

From within the chest cavity came a rustling, a caucus, a whispered vote.

"He wishes," the Semicolon reported, "to correct the interest joke as well."

"Record it," sighed the Veteran. "Revision is inheritance. File it under Revision, hostile, same as last time." And so it was recorded, and so it shall be performed forever: the joke and the banker's furious rebuttal delivered simultaneously, by a mark in a paper collar, so that no future audience will ever distinguish the setup from the correction, and both will be true at once, and the archive will simply crack along that fault and go on standing, because a crack that both sides insist upon is the strongest joint there is.

But here—here—a young woman from the Parks Department arrived, clipboard and lanyard and a terrible sincerity, and she was Investigating. There had been an Incident. Four bags of ice. A quantity of marigolds. Property, allegedly, of the Irving station. A single red sequined child's shoe. And a large papier-mâché monument that had, the night before, and I quote the report, "left its designated area and proceeded westbound on Olive Street without a permit."

"Sir," she said to the banker, because he was the only adult human near the scene and adults are always the ones we blame, "did you or did you not instruct this structure to turn onto Olive Street?"

The banker opened his mouth. He was a man who had corrected two jokes, forfeited a night's sleep, and stood in salmon shorts before a weeping paper giant, and he grasped, with the sudden clarity that arrives only on the fifth of July, that he had reached the outer boundary of what he was prepared to explain to a person with a clipboard.

"On the advice of counsel"—there being no counsel; there being only the giants, and the smell, and the woman who may have been eighty years at the front of every crowd—"I respectfully decline to answer, on the grounds that any answer might tend to incriminate me."

He pleaded the Fifth on the fifth.

It was, everyone agreed, the funniest thing that happened all week, and it drew the biggest laugh, and not one of the colony had written it, and it dried a truly heroic quantity of flour paste, and

Grandmother's left elbow, which had been sagging toward the mud since midnight, quietly firmed and rose.

We must, before the ash settles, account for the lion. Six inches of yellow plush, faintly furious of expression, suspended from a bent brass hook beneath the largest puppet's jaw. Nobody had attached it. Every photograph contained it; no inventory mentioned it until an assistant clerk, decades late, penciled beneath the ledger line, almost apologetically, Small Lion. Appears Important. The colony saluted it before each performance. The children saluted because the colony did. The adults saluted because the children did. Authority had entered the park not by decree but by repetition, which is the only way authority has ever actually entered anywhere, the constitutional preamble being merely repetition with better handwriting. The colony's theology held the lion to be the Sleeping Actress, salvaged from a fragment about a young lady whose stage entrances were governed by forces beyond her control, so that one night, when the leading man drew his revolver at a door and cried come out or I will shoot, three times, escalating, nothing

came, and nothing came, and nothing came, until a disgusted voice arrived from the wings to observe that there was no sense shooting, as the lady was fast asleep in her dressing room downstairs. Every year the entire apparatus leveled its wooden revolver at that little plush face—come out, come out, or we will shoot—and every year the lion declined, sublimely, to appear, to move, to so much as acknowledge the revolver of history. And every year the disgusted voice came from deep in the wire—go on and shoot, she's asleep—and nobody shot, and the lion frowned, or did not; and if it frowned, more paper was applied before sunset; and if it smiled, which some swore had occurred exactly once, in 1983, over the strenuous objection of the surviving photographs, the crowd stayed after dark for six uninterrupted episodes of a telenovela concerning a cracked parking meter and the ghost of a trolley transfer. On the morning of the fifth, in the gray light, with the banker pleading his amendment and the nurse-maid counting her invisible old men and the marigolds wilting in the knee, someone looked up at the lion to read the forecast.

And the lion—well. We will come to the lion.

For this is the part the colony trusts most and understands least: whenever the park nears settling, whenever a version threatens to harden into the version, a fact into the fact, when the historian's annotations begin to sound suspiciously like a conclusion, a damp cardboard box appears beside the bandstand. Nobody delivers it. Nobody claims it. It simply is, the way weather is, the way the fifth of July is always, without fail, the day after the dream. The box that morning held a fistful of receipts; a booking agency's letterhead upon which a stenographer, transferred from a New York office to a Chicago one, had on her first morning mistaken the local custom and instructed the manager to kiss her so she could get to work; a page from the minutes of some vanished performers' club in which the old-timers boasted that in their day nobody divorced, nobody separated, everyone stuck to the partner who had helped them get their start—Murphy and Murphy, and the rest of that loyal extinct company—only for a younger voice to pipe up that he had been married a mere three years but was sticking as fast as he possibly could, and would

somebody kindly give him time to earn his place among the faithful. The colony, which marries a giant every July and divorces a shoulder by August, which elopes with an elbow and abandons a kneecap without a note, received this the way it received all inheritance: as material, not as meaning. They adopted it as their loyalty oath. Sticking as fast as we can. Give us time. We'll get into the class of the old ones. Sometime. They meant it. They have always meant it. It is possible to mean a thing with your whole heart and still be a colony of punctuation marks eating a paper woman from the inside, and if you find that contradiction difficult, you have never lived in a body, and I congratulate you on your good fortune.

The box also held a program from a Cuban melodrama nobody in Bangor had ever seen, a receipt for a twenty-dollar deposit missing since 1918, the single red sequined child's shoe, and, folded small and foxed brown beneath everything, a page of some old trouper's complaints about the impossible trade of getting laughs for a living.

The colony bowed to the box. The giants, all of them, knelt lower. Someone threaded fresh wire through Grandmother's ancient shoulder. Someone mixed a new bucket of paste, gray and cool and smelling of childhood glue. Someone pasted the banker's pleaded Fifth, and the nurse-maid's question, and the young clipboard-woman's incident report over the top of the vaudeville sketches, so that next July the ticket stubs of the semiquincentennial will be part of the leg, and the salmon shorts will be part of the liturgy, and the whole delirious literal-minded night before will have become simply another stratum, another skin, another century for some future colony to fail to understand and love anyway. Someone read aloud a punchline no longer attached to any nation, and the small crowd of the fifth—hungover, forgiving, American—laughed. Not at the joke. At the failure of the joke, at the Olive Street car and the ice on the butter and the wrong nationality in the wrong town, at the whole magnificent machine of misremembering. It was not the old laughter. It could never be the old laughter; it had drifted a full century from its source and would drift another. But it was laughter, and laughter is

another seam, and the seam was visible, and a visible seam is proof—the only proof there is—that forgetting had tried its absolute hardest and failed completely.

Beneath the newest layer now—beneath the receipts and the sequined shoe, beneath the pleaded amendment and the loyalty oath, beneath the marigolds going brown in the knee and the meltwater drying to a salt-line map of no known country, protected by playbills and revolvers that never fired and undertakers whose names nobody caught—the oldest fragment still waited under its hundred and fourteen years of repair. A single sentence in a typeface older than the town's streetlights. Two words the colony had promoted from complaint to scripture, from a comedian's private terror to the founding law of the whole standing paper republic:

DYING STANDING UP.

No one knew whose act it had been. No one ever would. And that not-knowing was not a wound in the archive but the very substance of it, the dark humid space in which the next inheritance could grow.

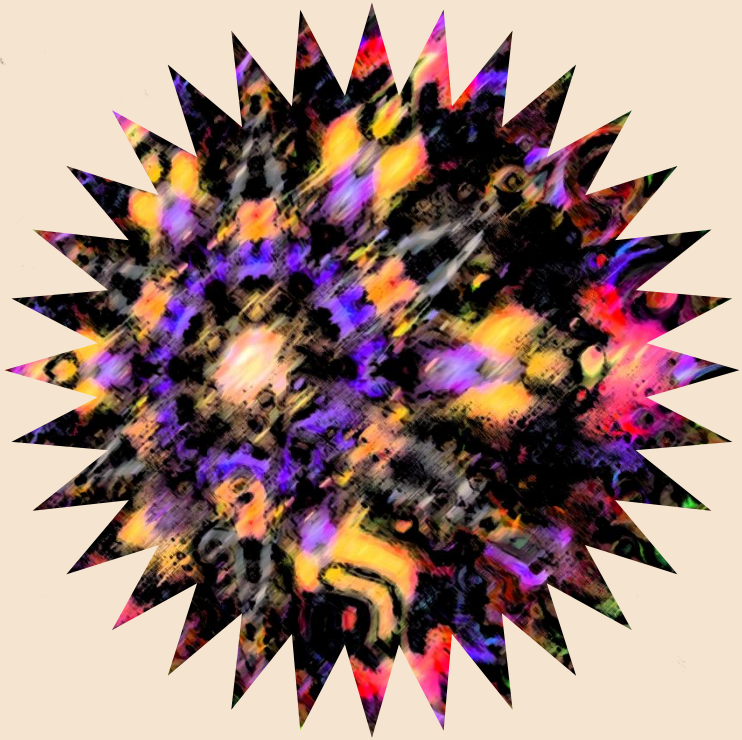
Someone looked up, at last, at the little yellow lion beneath Grandmother's jaw, to read the weather for the coming year.

The tiny lion smiled.

The archive was alive.

Nothing survived alone.

Hai na?



Drowning

By Kristen Bell

Sacred punch,
You're a dead dog's dinner
Thinner than a half-baked hunch

Red fiz and gee whiz 90 proof fire water
Ladled up lethargically
Like infantile baptism
Into cracked cup and comeuppance

Waterfall tears and waves of ill-advised
confessional vitriol
dissolving in the blood
alkaloids unlimited in regrettable regression
into womb-like cocoon
sensoring, soothing, smothering
into unresolved silence

ONE SIZE WORKS SECOND SHIFT AT THE STILLWATER SOHO SHOSHA SHOPALOT

Being a document recovered from beneath three flattened granola bar boxes in the break room, ink compromised by condensation from a leaking Dasani, serial unknown, functioning regardless

The trailer arrived already sweating and One Size knew the load was wrong before the dock lead popped the seal because the metal gave off a sound like a filing cabinet remembering something it had been asked to forget, a low tonal groan that traveled through the concrete apron and into his boots—the left one, tonight, bearing the soaring musculature of Mighty Mouse across its sock, the right encasing a screaming lattice of cheap cheese product, Nachos, each foot as always marching to a different discounted drummer—and the groan continued upward through the tibia into the lupus-mask rash blooming across his cheekbones like a topographical survey of a country that had never been granted sovereignty, which is to say his face, which is to say the face of a man who had arrived at the Stillwater Soho Shosha Shopalot at 3:47 PM in a 1998 Mitsubishi Mirage on a donut spare

that had been past its expiration date since the second Clinton administration, the vehicle's dashboard a geological cross-section of accumulated grievances: rubber ducks, a frowning Donald Duck, receipts from seven Thai restaurants of which only two still existed, a Speak & Spell set to a language no one had programmed, and the permanent ghost-scent of Drunken Noodles which had permeated the upholstery so thoroughly that the fabric itself had developed opinions about lemongrass.

He clocked in. The badge was clipped wrong. It was always clipped wrong. The photograph on it showed a man who had not yet understood that retail was a verb.

The dock lights hummed like nervous insects negotiating a treaty with fluorescence, and beneath them the first pallet emerged from the trailer's dark interior—which was not dark in the way of absence but dark in the way of compression, the way a river is dark when it carries the sediment of every decision made upstream—and the pallet leaned. It leaned fourteen degrees to the south-southeast, which One Size registered not with a level or a

protractor but with the part of his body that the pulp mill had taught to read weight before language could arrive to name it, the part that knew a tree was falling not by sight or sound but by a shift in the quality of silence, and this pallet was falling, slowly, municipally, with the bureaucratic patience of a structure that had filed the appropriate paperwork for its own collapse.

"Pallet's leaning," said the dock lead, whose name was either Kevin or Keith, One Size had never determined which because the name tag was perpetually obscured by the clipboard held at exactly the angle required to block all identifying information, a clipboard that functioned not as an organizational tool but as a shield against the possibility that anyone might address him as a person rather than a function, and the clipboard contained, One Size had observed during the three weeks he had worked second shift, exactly four documents: a load manifest from Tuesday that was now irrelevant, a safety checklist that had been signed by someone named "D. Strukt" which was almost certainly not a real name, a photocopy of a photocopy of a memo about proper lifting technique in which the human

spine was depicted as a series of interlocking parentheses, and beneath all of these, visible only when the clipboard was set down during the dock lead's twelve-minute break at 7:15, a photograph of a dog that might have been a beagle or might have been the idea of a dog preserved in wallet-sized laminate against the specific loneliness of supervising people who unloaded trucks for a living.

The pallet landed on the dock floor with a sound that was not a crash but a settlement, the way houses settle, the way towns settle, the way Bangor settled into its post-lumber identity like a man lowering himself into a chair he was not entirely sure would hold. One Size caught the corner before it tipped. His gloves—already developing the particular gray of industrial intimacy, the gray that is not a color but a relationship between skin and cardboard repeated four hundred times per shift—gripped the shrink wrap, and the shrink wrap caught the light like wet glass, which was one of the things the Kintsugi Drift Engine would have filed under mineralization: an ordinary detail slowly becoming symbolic through repeated exposure,

like a chipped enamel cup, like a station clock, like the specific way fluorescent light turns human skin into a bureaucratic document.

And then the Kerosene Orator rolled around the corner of Aisle 7.

It was a square gray box approximately the dimensions and general disposition of those chicken coop kerosene heaters you see in farm supply catalogs from 1974—squat, galvanized, vented on three sides with louvers that suggested both mechanical breathing and permanent suspicion—except that it was mounted on four caster wheels of mismatched diameter, which gave it a gait, a lurch, a peripatetic swagger that was somehow both purposeful and lost, like a municipal inspector who had been given jurisdiction over a territory that no longer appeared on any map. The Shopalot's assistant manager, a woman named Debra whose hair was the exact color of a safety cone that had been left in the sun for two fiscal years, claimed it was a PA speaker. The manufacturer's plate, bolted to its left flank with Phillips-head screws that had been stripped into uselessness, read MODEL KO-7 / PROVISIONAL FREQUENCY /

STILLWATER DIVISION, and beneath that, in smaller type that appeared to have been applied by rubber stamp: FOR INTERNAL USE ONLY / NOT A METAPHOR.

It was, however, both.

The Kerosene Orator had been broadcasting since before One Size started second shift, since before the current store manager had arrived, since before the loading dock had been resurfaced with the particular shade of industrial gray that the city of Bangor applied to all surfaces it wished to render invisible. No one knew who had installed it. No one knew who programmed its loop. The assistant manager Debra said it had "come with the building," the way you might say a river came with a valley, as though infrastructure were a natural phenomenon rather than a decision made by someone who had since been absorbed into the same municipal sediment that swallowed tax records and good intentions.

What the Kerosene Orator said, as it rolled through the back rooms and down the aisles on its mismatched wheels, listing slightly starboard, trailing a power cord that appeared to be plugged

into nothing and drawing current from either the building's electrical system or the collective unconscious of American retail, was this:

ATTENTION ASSOCIATES. THE COGNITIVE REGIMENT HAS BEEN DEPLOYED IN AISLE FOUR. PLEASE SEGREGATE METAPHORS FROM SEASONAL MERCHANDISE. UNAUTHORIZED SUBPERSONALITIES MUST OBTAIN TEMPORARY INNER ZONING PERMITS BEFORE CONSTRUCTING NEW OPINIONS. THE HIGHER SELF IS CURRENTLY UNDERGOING SCHEDULED MAINTENANCE AND WILL BE UNAVAILABLE UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE. PLEASE USE THE AUXILIARY CONSCIENCE LOCATED BEHIND THE LAUNDROMAT. THIS HAS BEEN A MESSAGE FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF ONTOLOGICAL RECEIVING. DAMAGED CONSCIOUSNESS SHOULD BE PLACED IN CLAIMS.

It said this every eleven minutes. It had been saying this, or versions of this—the text mutated slightly with each cycle, as though the original document had been translated three times by people who only half understood it and then

mimeographed in purple ink sometime around 1978—for as long as anyone on second shift could remember, which was not long, because second shift operated on a different temporal standard than the rest of the store, a standard governed not by clocks but by the number of pallets remaining, the declining quality of light through the dock door, and the slow metabolic collapse of whatever the break room microwave had done to someone's burrito at 6:30.

One Size did not ignore the Kerosene Orator. He did not listen to it either. He let it pass through him the way the Kenduskeag let debris pass through its culverts during spring flood: without resistance, without endorsement, with the understanding that everything the current carried would eventually be deposited somewhere downstream and would there acquire new meaning through proximity to whatever else had washed up. This was the method. This had always been the method. The Grimoire—the Fiction Alchemist's Grimoire, the one he had typed on a pawn-shop Linux box whose screen was cracked diagonally across the command line—had a name for this: the Prague Scan. What is

explicitly visible? The Kerosene Orator rolling past the paper towel endcap. What is so normal it goes unmentioned? That the paper towels are stacked in a formation that replicates, precisely, the defensive arrangement of logs in a Penobscot boom during the lumber era, each roll braced against the next in a pattern designed to resist current, which is to say designed to resist movement, which is to say designed to resist time itself. What rule does that normality enforce? That product must remain stationary until purchased. That value is determined by location on the shelf. That a thing is worth what the tag says, not what the river knows.

He sorted boxes.

The categories were half practical, half something else—a something else that the dock lead Kevin-or-Keith would not have recognized as method because it did not appear on the clipboard:

Crushable. These went on top. They contained cereal, chips, the kind of bread that had been engineered to survive shipping but not consumption, bread whose ingredient list read

like a chemical treaty between nations that did not trust each other.

Survivable. These went on bottom. Canned goods. Detergent. The ballast of empire, as the B&M Baked Beans had once announced from the kitchen counter on the Tree Streets at 3:07 AM, though that was another story, or the same story weathered into a different shape, the way a grandmother's recipe returns folded inside a fertilizer circular.

Seasonal. These occupied a category that was neither temporal nor commercial but something closer to liturgical: the Halloween candy arriving in August, the Christmas lights arriving in September, the Valentine's hearts arriving before the Christmas lights had been marked down, each season overlapping the last like geological strata, like the thirty layers of paint on a Tree Street house, each layer a different decade's idea of what color safety looked like.

Permanently haunted. These were the boxes that had traveled too far to be innocent. One Size registered them by weight, by the particular density of objects that had passed through too

many warehouses, too many sorting facilities, too many hands that did not know what they were holding. A box of picture frames that smelled faintly of a factory in Guangdong. A case of candles whose wicks were already mourning. Three cartons of off-brand batteries that hummed at a frequency dogs could hear, the same frequency the trees on the Tree Streets were screaming at, according to the Grimoire, the unassailable frequency where sawdust meets digital noise, 432Hz, the signal radius of everything that had been stripped of its identity so it could travel.

Spiritually resistant. These were the boxes that would not open cleanly, whose tape had fused with the cardboard in a bond that was not adhesive but contractual, boxes that had decided, somewhere between the distribution center in New Jersey and the loading dock in Bangor, that they did not wish to be unpacked, did not wish to participate in the cycle of Find Structure → Print Ruin → Chase Clunky Utility → Fund New Dives with Old Bills, and who could blame them, because the cycle was not optional, the cycle was the operating system, and the operating system

was a tutu-clad man leaping through the slurry of his own making, which was not a metaphor One Size would have chosen for himself but which had been chosen for him by the Test Patients of Project Fever Dream, and which therefore stood.

The Kerosene Orator completed another circuit. It had acquired, since the last pass, a shopping list taped to its left louver—not by anyone on staff, apparently by no one, the list simply appearing the way marginalia appears on samizdat documents, the way footnotes begin arguing with one another in texts that have been photocopied too many times: eggs (brown), eggs (conceptual), bread (for kneading through coffee filters), rabbit liver (ask hermit), one roll of shrink wrap for archival purposes, DO NOT PURCHASE TUESDAYS THEY HAVE BEEN RECALLED. The Orator did not acknowledge the list. It continued:

NOTICE: DUE TO ATMOSPHERIC PRESSURE FLUCTUATIONS, THE COGNITIVE REGIMENT (MUNICIPAL AUXILIARY) WILL MEET IN THE BREAK ROOM RATHER THAN THE ABANDONED YMCA. MEMBERS ARE REMINDED TO

WEAR GROCERY BAGS OVER THEIR HATS TO PREVENT UNAUTHORIZED METAPHORS FROM NESTING IN THE EARS. ANYONE WISHING TO CONSTRUCT A NEW OPINION MUST FIRST OBTAIN SIGNATURES FROM THE SKEPTIC, THE HOUSEWIFE, THE SABOTEUR, THE ACCORDION INSPECTOR, AND WHICHEVER PERSONALITY CURRENTLY HAS CUSTODY OF TUESDAY. APPLICATIONS ARE AVAILABLE AT THE SERVICE DESK. THE SERVICE DESK IS CLOSED. THE SERVICE DESK HAS ALWAYS BEEN CLOSED. THIS IS NOT A CONTRADICTION. THIS IS ZONING.

Forklift Carl—not the Carl who wore Adidas sandals with white socks cut too short to matter, not that Carl, not the Carl who smelled of convenience and proposed efficiencies and surfaced in reflective glass, not that Carl who whispered End it. Save time. Conclude the process, though the name was the same and the coincidence was the kind of thing the Drift Engine would have filed under faulting: contradictory memories coexist, neither replaces

the other, the landscape simply cracks—Forklift Carl moved through the back room with the alarming confidence and weak sense of physics that defined his operating style, the forklift's backup alarm beeping a rhythm that was indistinguishable from a warning about the next decade. He was twenty-three. He had a tattoo on his forearm that said STILL HERE in a font that suggested both defiance and a very specific tattoo parlor on Hammond Street that charged by the letter. He drove the forklift the way the Mirage drove through the Tree Streets: as a crotchety republic, sovereignty maintained through sheer refusal to acknowledge the possibility of mechanical failure.

"You know what that thing is saying?" Forklift Carl asked, jerking his chin toward the retreating Orator. He did not stop the forklift to ask this. He asked it in transit, which was the only register he operated in.

"It's saying what it's always saying," One Size said, which was true in the way that the Kenduskeag was always saying what it was always saying, which was everything, which was nothing anyone had successfully transcribed.

"It's saying some weird shit about cognitive regiments."

"It's a PA speaker."

"It's a kerosene heater."

"It's a PA speaker that looks like a kerosene heater."

"It looks like a kerosene heater that thinks it's a PA speaker."

This was the Chavruta Loop, the disputatious mode, the third pillar, the table where every claim met its counter-claim and neither was required to win. If everything is systemic, nothing is free; if nothing is free, where does the beer money go? One Size did not resolve the contradiction. He let Carl pass. The forklift beeped its decade-warning. A pallet of paper towels assumed its defensive position.

Somewhere in the middle stretch of the shift—the hours between 7 and 10 PM that existed in a temporal zone the Grimoire called the Cellar of Pain, the hours when the body becomes a meter and time bends and co-workers begin to resemble local folklore—One Size found himself in the

stockroom's deepest corridor, the one behind the seasonal overflow, behind the Christmas lights that were already arriving though it was August, behind the endcap of discounted sunscreen that smelled like the memory of a vacation no one in this zip code could afford, in the corridor where the overhead lights had been reduced to every third fixture by a facilities decision that had the texture of a memo written during a budget crisis and never revisited, so that the corridor existed in alternating bands of institutional light and pre-institutional shadow, like a barcode, like a redacted document, like the sewer maps that One Size had once discovered were actually diagrams of municipal memory.

And there, in the shadow band, the Kerosene Orator had stopped.

It had never stopped before. In three weeks of second shift it had maintained its circuit with the regularity of a celestial body or a bureaucratic process, rolling through the aisles and back rooms on its mismatched casters, trailing its unplugged cord, broadcasting its eleven-minute loop of mutated cognitive warfare rhetoric that had been so thoroughly metabolized by the

building's acoustic environment that it had ceased to be propaganda and become weather. But now it was stopped, and from its louvers came not the usual broadcast but a different sound, lower, more granular, the sound of a machine trying to remember something it had been told to forget, and One Size stood in the shadow band and listened.

What it said was this, and it said it only once:

THE RIVER IS A RECEIPT YOU CAN'T RETURN. THE MANIFEST IS A POEM THAT DOESN'T KNOW IT'S A POEM. EVERY BOX YOU OPEN IS AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL LAYER. EVERY BARCODE IS A FAILED ATTEMPT TO CLASSIFY REALITY. EVERY PALLET THAT LEANS IS LEANING TOWARD SOMETHING THE INVENTORY SYSTEM CANNOT NAME. YOU ARE NOT UNLOADING TRUCKS. YOU ARE DECIDING WHAT ENTERS THE TOWN'S BLOODSTREAM. THE TRUCKS WILL KEEP COMING. THE TOWN WILL KEEP ABSORBING. THE PROCESS IS NOT OPTIONAL. THE PROCESS IS THE PROCESS. BUT THE WAY YOU TOUCH THE BOXES—THAT IS YOURS.

Then it resumed its circuit, listing slightly starboard, its louvers breathing the recycled air of the Stillwater Soho Shosha Shopalot, and its regular broadcast returned:

ATTENTION ASSOCIATES.

PSYCHOLOGICAL INFRASTRUCTURE INSPECTION WILL OCCUR DURING THIRD SHIFT. PLEASE ENSURE ALL INTERIOR LOAD-BEARING BELIEFS ARE PROPERLY BRACED. THE DEPARTMENT OF ONTATIONAL RECEIVING REMINDS YOU THAT REALITY IS PROVISIONALLY TRUE AND SUBJECT TO REVISION WITHOUT NOTICE. HAVE A PRODUCTIVE EVENING.

One Size stood in the shadow band for four seconds longer than the work allowed. Then he returned to the dock. The next trailer was backing in. Its backup alarm harmonized briefly with Forklift Carl's, creating a chord that the Signal Radius—the unassailable frequency where sawdust meets digital noise—would have recognized as a cousin, a descendant, a mutation of the same tone the three hundred sawmills had once produced when they were all running

simultaneously, turning forests into money and money into absence, the absence that stayed, that always did the most work, that you could feel in the wide streets built for wagons that never came back, in the houses too big for their current sentences.

Night Cashier Queenie materialized at the dock door. She was not supposed to be at the dock door. Cashiers occupied a different stratum of the Shopalot's ecosystem, the bright-lit front end where transactions occurred in the open and everything was scannable and the only mystery was why anyone would buy fourteen cans of cat food and a single birthday candle at 9:47 PM, which Queenie had witnessed and filed without comment because Queenie heard everything, believed nothing, and remembered only the good rumors. She was fifty-one. She wore reading glasses on a beaded chain that she had made herself from beads she had taken from a broken necklace she had found in a shopping cart in the parking lot in 2019, and the beads were blue and green and one was cracked, and the cracked one was her favorite because, she had told One Size during the only break they had ever shared, "it

lets the light in wrong, and wrong light is the only honest light."

"The box is talking again," she said.

"It's always talking."

"It said something different just now. It said something about Tuesday being recalled."

"Tuesday has been recalled."

"Which Tuesday?"

"All of them. Provisionally."

Queenie looked at him the way the Penobscot looked at the things it carried: without judgment, without resistance, with the understanding that circulation was a form of memory. "You're a strange man," she said.

"I'm a body carrying incompatible instructions," he said, and this was not a joke and was not not a joke, it was the colophon, the final line of the Monthermer/One Size Synthesis, printed on unstable ground with compromised ink: He walks. Not as conqueror. Not as martyr. Not as witness. As a body carrying incompatible instructions—still moving, still failing forward.

The road defeats no one. It only records the attempt.

Queenie returned to the front end. The automatic doors sighed behind her. Outside, the parking lot held the Mirage in its sodium-lit embrace, the donut spare visible even from this distance, the Japanese script on the flank— Chiwit Pai Rueai, Life Goes On—not suggesting gentle forward motion but rather the unstoppable viscous flow of product toward consumption, of shift toward completion, of night toward the specific quality of morning that arrives in Bangor like a memo from a department you didn't know existed, informing you that the process has been approved and your participation was never optional.

The last pallets were thinner, stranger, more damaged. This was always true. The last pallets of every trailer carried the merchandise that had been loaded first, which meant it had borne the weight of everything loaded after, which meant it arrived compressed, deformed, bearing the imprint of the entire load's history in its crushed corners and split cardboard, a palimpsest, an archaeological site where the weight of transit

had left evidence that no manifest recorded. One Size handled these with the attention the Grimoire called intimacy through distance: placing his most personal understanding inside objects that could not speak or perceive it. He straightened a case of canned peaches that had developed a dent shaped, if you were the kind of person who looked—and One Size was that kind of person, had always been that kind of person, the kind who noticed that the city's sewer maps were actually diagrams of municipal memory, the kind who catalogued benches, waiting rooms, parkades, ferry slips, town libraries with handwritten signage, the kind who mapped places designed to slow people without permission—shaped like the outline of Prince Edward Island, where the red dirt was a forensic necrosign of an iron-rich past that stained your boots and your history.

He set the peaches on the shelf. The dent faced inward. No one would see it. It would exert pressure anyway, the way buried memory exerts pressure, the way a photograph that no longer exists continues to organize the space where it hung, the way Charlottetown ceased responding

to him and the cessation itself became a kind of address, a forwarding label affixed to every subsequent location: Previously at: a place that has stopped answering.

The Kerosene Orator made its final pass of the shift. It rolled through the loading dock at 10:52 PM, eight minutes before clock-out, trailing its phantom cord, bearing its accumulated marginalia—the shopping list had been joined by a small drawing, apparently in crayon, of a bear wearing a hard hat, and beneath the bear someone had written in pencil so faint it was almost an act of discretion rather than communication: Subpar but present—and its broadcast had shifted again, the mutation advancing one generation further from whatever original text had seeded it, the Russian article on cognitive warfare now so thoroughly metabolized by the building, by the shift, by the acoustic ecology of fluorescent lights and forklift alarms and the particular silence of a retail stockroom at the end of second shift, that it had become something the original authors would not have recognized, something that was neither propaganda nor parody but a third thing, a civic

organism, a voice that belonged to the building the way the hum of the Kenduskeag belonged to the streets above it:

CLOSING ANNOUNCEMENT. THE DEPARTMENT OF ONTATIONAL RECEIVING WISHES TO INFORM ALL ASSOCIATES THAT TONIGHT'S SHIPMENT HAS BEEN PROCESSED. DAMAGED CONSCIOUSNESS HAS BEEN PLACED IN CLAIMS. UNAUTHORIZED METAPHORS HAVE BEEN RETURNED TO SENDER. THE HIGHER SELF REMAINS UNDER MAINTENANCE. THE AUXILIARY CONSCIENCE BEHIND THE LAUNDROMAT REPORTS FULL CAPACITY. TOMORROW'S LOAD WILL ARRIVE AT THE USUAL TIME. THE USUAL TIME IS ALWAYS. THANK YOU FOR YOUR PROVISIONAL SERVICE. THE STRUCTURE HOLDS.

One Size clocked out. The badge unclipped. The dock lights continued their negotiation with the dark. The store went quiet but the dock kept thinking. He walked to the Mirage. The donut spare had not improved. The dashboard's geological cross-section of accumulated

grievances had acquired, during the shift, a new stratum: a receipt from the break room vending machine, $1.75 for a bag of pretzels that had tasted like the specific intersection of salt and institutional patience, and the receipt was already curling, already becoming a tiny scroll, already preparing to be archived by the car's interior ecology alongside the rubber ducks and the frowning Donald Duck and the permanent ghost-scent of Drunken Noodles.

He turned the key. The engine agreed. The Mirage pulled out of the Stillwater Soho Shosha Shopalot parking lot and onto Stillwater Avenue, heading south toward the Tree Streets, toward the kitchen table where the three cans of B&M Baked Beans still stood as evidence, toward the plaid shacket hanging on the chair, toward the pawn-shop Linux box with its screen cracked diagonally across the command line, toward the next issue of the zine that would document what the shift had deposited—not meaning, never meaning, meaning was for people who had time to sit down—but pressure, the pressure of boxes handled four hundred times, the pressure of fluorescent weather endured for seven hours, the

pressure of a kerosene heater on wheels telling you things about your own cognition that you had not asked to know and could not unhear and would not, because unloading trucks was really about deciding what enters the town's bloodstream and what gets left behind in the trailer, and he had decided, tonight as every night, to let it all in, to let it circulate, to let the river do what the river does, which is remember not by holding but by moving, moving, always moving, the donut spare wobbling its imperfect revolution against the Bangor asphalt, Chiwit Pai Rueai, life goes on, the structure holds, the truck was empty, the night was not.

Printed on unstable ground. Ink compromised. Serial ∆7Γ9Ψ. Partially wrong. Functioning regardless.

PROVISIONALLY TRUE

☍ ∵ ⊙ †

Citations

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FOX'S
Cramp and Diarrhœa Mixture.
A sure and speedy remedy
FOR
CRAMP, DIARRHŒA, DYSENTERY
CHOLERA MORBUS, and
FIRST STAGES OF ASIATIC CHOLERA.
This Preparation has been
thoroughly tested in hundreds
during the Cholera of
of 1866, and I am
the public that
prepara-
DIRECTIONS.
Shake well before using.
DOSE.—For an Adult, a teaspoonful every half
or hour, according to the severity of the case.
For a Child 10 years old, 20 to 30 drops; 5 years old
10 to 15 drops, in a little sweetened water.
INE WITHOUT THE SIGNATURE

THE PANOPTICON INSTITUTE *for* RECURSIVE INQUIRY

(FOWL FEATHERED REVIEW / BACKPAGE BROADSIDE EDITION / VOL. IX: THE BUREAU OF ERRANT KNOWLEDGE)

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"THE SYLLABUS WAS LAST SEEN NEGOTIATING ITS OWN LEGIBILITY IN A CORRIDOR OF UNSTABLE LIGHTING!"

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metaphysics served in chipped institutional porcelain
accreditation so irregular it circles back into legitimacy by misadventure

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A Most Extraordinary And Somewhat Forbidden Treatise Upon Wandering Signifiers, Being Also A Fluxus Instruction Set, Crackpot Alchemical Tablet, and Educational Relic of The Lower Halls

☩ Article I — Of Drunken Signification and The Staggering Letter

Wherein It Is Proved That Meaning Moves Like A Disbanded Regiment Through Rain

The signifier no longer points.
It stumbles.
It reels through language like a tired herald who has forgotten which kingdom he serves.
Meaning is not delivered.
It is spilled.

☩ Article II — Of The Low Institutes of Broken Halls and Improvised Learning Wherein Education Occurs Without Permission or Stability

Education is not transmitted.
It is:
shouted through cracked brass speaking horns
written on the reverse of expired municipal forms
whispered by instructors who may themselves be misunderstandings
The classroom is wherever attention refuses to remain seated.

☩ Article III — Of Crackpot Alchemy Most High and Questionable Declaration of Transmutation By Error and Persistent Misreading

All substances are symbolic until they misbehave.
All symbols are material until they collapse under their own enthusiasm.
Gold is what happens when:
failure persists long enough to be mistaken for method
method forgets its function and becomes decorative
decoration begins issuing instructions

☩ Article IV — Of Fluxus Instruction Most Radical And Unauthorized Command for Performative Disassembly of Text and Object

Take heed:
cut the text into fragments

rearrange without consultation
affix fragments to a radiator or other warm
bureaucratic surface
allow weather to annotate the result
declare it an examination artifact

☩ Article V — Of The Mirror That Refuses To Stay Still

Note On The Subject as Misfiled Echo in Administrative Space

The subject is:
a clerical error that learned to speak in complete sentences.
Desire is:
paperwork missing its explanation
corridors reflecting themselves incorrectly
diplomas that already exist but await recognition

NOSCE TE IPSUM, MISREAD IT WELL.

ERRARE HUMANUM, PERSISTERE MAGISTERIUM.

THE

PANOPTICON INSTITUTE FOR RECURSIVE INQUIRY

BUREAU OF ERRANT KNOWLEDGE & IMPROBABLE CERTIFICATION

PERAMBULA, ERRA, RIDE, RUMINA.

SAPIENTIA NON CAPTUR. SED COLLIGITUR.

DISCIPULUS ERRATICUS, MAGISTER NULLIUS.

LINGUA EST LABYRINTHUS.

TESTIMONIUM MIRABILIS ET ERRATICUM

BE IT KNOWN THROUGHOUT ALL QUIET CORRIDORS,
UNSTABLE HALLS, AND UNREGISTERED STUDY ZONES:

THAT THE BEARER HEREIN NAMED

YOUR NAME HERE

HATH PASSED THROUGH THE THREE-FOLD STRANGE EXAMINATION:

THE ADVERTISEMENT MOST DELIRIOUS | THE MANIFESTO MOST FRACTURED | THE OBJECT MOST IMPROBABLE

FIELD OF STRANGE STUDIES

- ☐ Minor Arcana Bureaucratic Distortion
- ☐ Linguistic Drift and Skaldic Compression Arts
- ☐ Applied Vaudeville Ontology
- ☐ Fluxus Instructional Disassembly Practice
- ☐ Crackpot Alchemical Reasoning (Unregulated but Functional)
- ☐ Diner Semiotics & Jukebox Cosmology

METHOD OF CERTIFICATION

INSTITUTUM ERRATICUM

By means of:

- sustained misreading of unstable instruction fields
- extraction of coherence from contradictory text masses
- recognition of hidden instruction beneath apparent nonsense
- endurance of semantic turbulence without withdrawal
- acceptance of humor at structurally inappropriate moments

LITTERA FUGIT SENSUS MANET

DECLARATION OF AUTHORITY

This diploma is hereby proclaimed:

- ☐ not accredited in any jurisdiction
- ☐ not unaccredited in any stable sense but misreading

It is valid only in:

- marginalia of uncertain provenance
- basements where fluorescent lighting hesitates
- kiosks of doubtful municipal standing
- and any place where language begins behaving like weather

FINAL CLAUSE OF RECOGNITION

THOU HAST NOT RECEIVED THIS DIPLOMA.
THOU HAST ONLY NOTICED THAT IT WAS ALREADY
BEING CUT OUT OF THE PAGE BEFORE THOU BEGANST TO READ.

TEMPORIS EDAX DIPLOMA MANET

NON SCHOLAE SED VITAE DISCIMUS

ARCHIVIST OF ACCIDENTAL RECORDS

REGISTRAR OF UNSTABLE MEANING

CUT HERE • FRAME HERE • MISREAD FOREVER

Die Aktion
VER SACRVM
ÜNSTLER
CHAFFEN
JEUES
Vorwärts
Volksblatt der Sozialdemokrati